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A COURSE IN PSYCHOLOGY FOR PUPIL NURSES

The New York City Hospital, Blackwell's Island, last year introduced into its curriculum, as a kind of an experiment, a short course in psychology. It was given in the latter part of the junior year, after the pupils had been on the wards for a few months and had thus accumulated a background of experience in dealing with patients and an appreciation of the problems of adjustment in hospital work. Miss Romer, a member of the staff of the Department of Psychology at Teachers College, who taught the course, took the greatest pains to acquaint herself with the special problems of nurses and to get the point of view of the pupils. The subject-matter was carefully selected and presented in a very simple and concrete way, the pupils being invited from the beginning to bring to the class all kinds of problems upon which psychology might help to throw light. The results have been very interesting. In the first place the pupils themselves have requested that the course be continued, and that in future it be a required course, with regular class work and study, which had not been included in the first course. As to practical results, there are many evidences that the pupils are thinking about their patients in quite a different way than before, that they are studying them as human beings, trying to understand the point of view of those who differ from them in race, religion, and social customs, trying to make their personal adjustment to their patients and to cooperate with them more intelligently, and assuming on the whole a more sympathetic, tolerant and reflective attitude toward human problems in general. They have shown a keener appreciation of the psychological elements in the commonest nursing procedures, such as the setting of a tray, the training of a baby in orderly habits, the administration of difficult or disagreeable treatments, and they have also shown that they have a much better basis for understanding pathological mental states, which in some degree complicate all kinds of diseases. It is a little more difficult to measure the personal and ethical influence of such a course, but it is believed that pupils did get some help in understanding the laws of their own natures better.

It is perfectly true, of course, that many of the principles of psychology are just common sense conclusions which people have always used more or less unconsciously in all the practical affairs of life. The science of psychology, however, does call attention to these fundamental ideas; it sifts them out and explains them; it organizes them and shows how they work. It has become a very practical science studied and consciously used by business men, travelling salesmen, advertising men and managers of factories, as well as teachers and preachers and college professors. If such practical people find it profitable to study

psychology as a means to greater efficiency and as a help in understanding and influencing people, it becomes a question whether nurses can afford to be without it. No one has a more difficult psychological problem to meet than the nurse, working as she does constantly with all kinds and varieties of people, many of them hypersensitive and unreasonable, having to adjust herself to the most widely varying conditions, having very often the added responsibility of leading and guiding weaker minds into more wholesome and rational lines of thought and conduct.

This department will be glad to hear of other schools where this subject is being taught and the results which have been achieved. The following brief outline gives some idea of the ground which Miss Romer is covering with the pupils of the City Hospital.

I. Psychology, science of behavior. Responses to "stimuli." People as organisms adjusting to changing environment, natural and social, by acting upon the environment. Behavior such adjustment.

II. Adjustment made by *nervous system*. Its structure, brain, cord, fibers, sympathetic system; neuroses. Functions. Nervous pathways. Readiness.

III. Pathways due to original nature. Reflexes. *Instincts*, their nature. Typical instincts. Readiness and original satisfiers. Modifying instincts.

IV. *Individual differences* in behavior. Central tendencies, the "curve of distribution." Causes of differences: heredity, race, family, variation; age; sex; past experience.

V. Effect of past experience on behavior. *Learning*. Habits. The "laws of learning." Practice. Specific nature of habits.

VI. Variety of responses to same stimulus. Influence of accompanying circumstances. "Mind set," mood, temperament. Influence of weather, health, fatigue, drugs, emotional state, purpose.

VII. *Thinking*. Physiological basis. Attention and interest. Memorizing. Association and analysis. Studying, "apperceptive mass." Reasoning.

VIII. *Feeling*. Pleasantness. "Satisfiers and annoyers." Association shifts of satisfaction. *Emotions*, their dependence on organic action. Control and use of feeling.

IX. *Doing*. Will and habit. Selection and attention in willing. Individual differences in will. Morality, social basis, psychological elements. "Character."

X. *Suggestion*. Presenting the stimulus that calls forth the desired act. Tact. Use of principles already discussed. Understanding people. Self-mastery.